Warren Commission and Critics: A Proposal

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Nearly 40 months have elapsed since the assassination of John F. Kennedy but the unofficial inquest—a strange melange of serious study, amateur detectivism and psychotic rumor-mongering—goes on. And there is no end in sight.

This chaotic aftermath to so shattering a world tragedy was probably inevitable. Some of the circumstances surrounding the slaying of Abraham Lincoln are still subjects of esoteric debate. But modern means of communication—including TV broadcasts as well as the wide circulation of books of varying scholarship—have given a special, universal aspect to the Kennedy postmortems.

We doubt that any further exploration that supported the basic findings of the Warren Commission would finally mute the controversy. Plainly there is a yearning in many places to believe that there was more to the story than the irrational, lonely aberrational act of an individual.

And yet, despite our deep confidence in the integrity of Chief Justice Warren, we believe at least one more official step should be taken.

The series by Michael Berlin published in this newspaper this week has attempted to define the legitimate, responsible questions that are still being asked. In his concluding article today some of the gray areas are summarized.

We see no purpose that could be served at this time by the full-scale repetition of the inquiry under new auspices—or by a sweeping investigation to determine whether such an inquiry is warranted. This could be a cycle of absurdity.

But we believe Justice Warren, with the approval of President Johnson, could render a large service by asking Lee Rankin, who acted as chief counsel to the Warren Commission, to review and report on the challenges that have been raised to the procedures and conclusions of the Commission. Presumably he would have renewed access to all the archives—as well as to the information claimed by New Orleans District Attorney Garrison and others who have belatedly professed some relevant knowledge. He would also require assurances of cooperation by all federal investigative agencies.

Rankin has so far contended that he believes the Commission's document satisfactorily answers its critics, and he has dealt with some isolated phases of the criticism. But the time is at hand for a comprehensive review and reply to the vast volume of counterattack the Commission's report has encountered.

No doubt it will be charged that such a project would be self-serving; no formula of reexamination will appease those who have acquired a vested interest in disbelief. But most Americans accept the proposition that Justice Warren and Mr. Rankin are honorable men, prepared to confront any real evidence of their own fallibility.

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Conceivably such a study would produce only a detailed, documented series of answers to the gaps some thoughtful men have found in a report drafted under conditions of intense, almost intolerable, pressure of time. But we are confident that Rankin, if he undertook the mission, would not close his mind to any authentic surprise he encountered, and that Justice Warren would support the hot pursuit of such material.

We urge prompt, serious consideration for such a venture, in perhaps agonizing [illegible]sal.